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THE CHURCH

AND

WORKING WOMEN

BY

REV. L. McKENNA, S.J., M.A.

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“THE CHURCH AND THE WORKING WOMAN.”

**Great number
of
wage-earning
women to-day.**

IN hardly any respect does our modern industrial system contrast more sharply or more unfavourably with the past than in the enormous number of women whom it forces to work for wages. In most countries from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. of the total number of women have to work thus. In Ireland if we reckon those who work in factories and workshops, those who work for hire on farms or in farm-houses, those who work in their homes at goods to be sold in shops, household servants, those engaged as clerks or shop assistants, those who are occupied in teaching or in the public service, there cannot be less than three-quarters of a million of women in receipt of wages.

Clearly therefore the question of women's work, its conditions and remuneration, concerns the vital interests of society.

**Law of work
universal**

When God imposed on our first parents the law of work He not merely inflicted it as a penance on the race, He ordained it as the way in which the race was to develop and fulfil the objects of its existence.

**but different
in its
application to
men and women.**

Now, as there is a difference between the functions which men perform and those which women perform in the development of the race and in the promoting of its welfare, it is clear that the law of work, though it binds all human beings, has a different application to men and to women. Hence any application of

that law of work which would be incompatible with women's nature—for instance, the imposing on women of work which by its character or by its severity would endanger women's social functions—would be contrary to God's ordinance and would be essentially wrong.

Again the Creator indicates the natural and normal spheres of man's work and of woman's work when He said to the man, "Cursed is the earth in thy work. With labour and toil shall it bring forth bread for thee," and to the woman, "in sorrow and pain shalt thou bring forth thy children." To the man he assigns external work, the production of wealth; to the woman, motherhood and its consequences, home work and the training of her children.

Home is the normal sphere of woman's work, As Pope Leo XIII. declares—"A woman is by nature suited for home work. This it is which is best adapted to preserve her modesty and secure the good up-bringing of her children and the well-being of the family."

The home is, therefore, the normal sphere of woman's activities, but it does not follow that every work outside that sphere is unjust. She is often called on, and even bound, to work outside this, her normal sphere.

though she has always to some extent worked outside her home, In all periods of the world's history there have been certain kinds of work which women, especially unmarried women, have done outside their own homes. As soon as slavery disappeared the workwoman and the maidservant appeared. Even in the heyday of the Christian ages there were women's work-guilds, chiefly for the making of linen and of women's clothes, and in all ages and places much of the easier kinds of work connected with agriculture have been done by women working for wages.

and especially to-day is forced to do so. Moreover the growth of modern industry has removed from beneath the family roof most of the occupations that kept the housewife busy in days gone by. The steam loom has made the spindle and distaff

useless, the workshop has lessened the work of the needle, factories and shops have ruined the old-time art of house-keeping. The home now tends to be the place where one merely sleeps and eats, not the place where one works. The poor woman and the rich woman alike procure from outside the things which of old they used to make themselves, but the poor woman has to go forth to gain by her wages the means of procuring those things. What she used to make in her house she now makes outside it, or she makes its equivalent in her wages. She has not ceased to work. She has only changed her place of work.

Also, it seems as if the necessities of life require women to work more than they used to in the past. It is true that the average wages of men have risen during the 19th century by about 75 per cent., while in the same time the price of food has only risen by about 40 per cent., while the prices of most manufactured articles have gone down to half of what they were. But, on the other hand, it is to be remembered that the machine-made goods of to-day are not as durable as the handmade ones of the past, that the price of lodging seems to have greatly increased, that unemployment takes from the nominal value of the higher wages of to-day, and (most important of all) that the progress of the world has created many new needs, new requirements of hygiene and food, new amusements, new comforts, the absence of which, though not felt as a grievance by those of two or three generations ago, would be an intolerable grievance for even the poor of to-day.

The poor woman then has to work. **Such work is often her duty.** If she has no one to support her, the case is clear. If she is married, she is her husband's "help," to use the word of Genesis. If then her husband fail, in whole or in part, to fulfil his natural function of the provider, she, the co-founder of the house, the partner, on whom equally with her husband God lays the responsibility of the family, must take up the task.

Often, too, perhaps, indeed, most often, the wife even of the strong workingman is forced to work in order to

supplement her husband's wages. This, of course, simply means that men, the proper providers of the home, very commonly do not receive a family wage. If they did their wives could confine themselves to their house-work; and, as a fact, where such a family wage is given, it is nearly always found to be the case that the wife does remain at home, and finds abundant occupation in her home duties.

This consequence of our social progress, the going forth of the woman from her home to work, is, as I have said, abnormal, but it is certainly not opposed to the law of work as applied to women.

**The effects of
such work
are often
ruinous**

It may, however, be opposed to it in its effects, and, alas! often is. The inhuman Liberalism, that has inspired the commercial world since the Industrial Revolution, has made the history of woman's labour, especially in the first half of the 19th century, one of the darkest and most disgraceful pages in human history. Public humanity has insisted, in defiance of Liberalistic principles, on the passing of many laws to restrain the abuses practised on woman workers, but even yet their condition remains more than an abnormality, it is a social heresy.

Even where all the requirements of the labour laws are conscientiously observed, where precautions are taken against imposing on women work unsuited to them, where the dangers to morality health and sobriety are guarded against—and I am confident that Catholic employers fulfil their obligations in this matter—even then there still remain (it cannot be denied) certain evils inherent in the very nature of the factory and the workshop, evils which do considerable harm, moral and physical, to women workers.

**especially in
breaking up
the family.**

Then, again, the solidity of the family is gravely compromised by the absence of the woman, and especially of the wife, from the home. The family is the centre of every man's life, the consolation of his heart, the motive force of his work, the fruitful source of future generations, the

pledge for the continuance and prosperity of the State. And the woman is even more than the man the very soul of the family. Remove her and the principle of unity of the home is broken, individuals will suffer and deteriorate, the State will disintegrate and decay.

Even home-work Modern industry not merely wrecks
often ruinous. many homes by driving woman forth
 "Sweating to work. It has managed to blight and
system." destroy many homes even while leaving
 the woman in them. There are wealthy men, or large companies of men, owning manufactories or large shops who get much work done by women working in their own homes. One would expect that in all fairness such women should be better paid than if they were working in a factory or workshop, for they save their employers heavy expenses of lighting heating rent and the hygienic conditions required by the law. Yet such poor women are the very slaves and drudges of the modern world. They work under conditions which cannot be so easily regulated by the protective agencies of the State; they do not benefit by even the attenuated bonds of human sympathy that unite the owner of a factory with his hands; they are less able to unite for their mutual protection; they are the first to suffer by having their work taken from them, or their wages cut down at the slightest depression in trade; they are completely at the mercy of unscrupulous employers.

Thus has arisen that awful "sweating system" which is crying to Heaven for vengeance on our society, that hideous exploitation of women, with its cruel killing work, its inhuman hours, its hunger, its heart-breaking, its despair, its diabolical temptations, its slow murder of children and women.

Other evil Shameful exploitation of women is
effects of one result of economic Liberalism; there
modern is another result not much less of a curse.
industrialism Woman, kept from her proper duties,
on women. has had her views of life falsified, her
 ambitions set in a wrong direction.

In pressing women into the rough and tumble fight for

existence, in putting before her, as her ideal, the modern virago instead of the gentle maid of Nazareth, in setting her up not as a help but as a rival of man, the modern world is working its ruin. We see the result. The children of the present generation have not the respect for their parents, nor the obedience to them which even the last generation had. We are alarmed at the increasing frequency of divorce and at the increasing contempt for the marriage bond, while the whole state of our society tends directly to this. Society is crumbling, collapsing because the bonds of charity and justice and family duty are strained and loosening.

**The Church's
anxiety for
the working
woman.**

It is the work of the Church to-day, as of old, to reform society so that all may enjoy a state of Christian contentment and may serve God in peace; and to no part of that work does she apply more energy and earnestness than to the reconstitution of family life, and to the saving of woman from the dangers that threaten her dignity and her position and functions in society.

**The Church
reminds
employers of
their duties to
their women
workers,**

First, the Church raises her voice in warning to individual consciences. She recalls to employers their solemn duties of justice with regard to the women who work for them; she threatens with God's eternal anger those who put women at work unsuited to them, those who manage their factories or workshops or offices or households so as to prejudice the morality or the health of their women workers; she recalls to the minds of shareholders that they have responsibilities with regard to those poor women whom they have never seen, but from whose labour they get their dividends. She reminds all employers of women's work, shopkeepers, manufacturers, owners of workshops, managers of offices, mistresses of households, everyone who directly employs women, or who, as shareholders in companies, appoint representatives to employ them—she reminds all such of their strict obligation to pay a decent wage.

**and especially
of their duty
to pay a just
wage.**

It is with regard to this last point, to the matter of wages, that Catholic employers, as well as others, have most to reproach themselves, and it is therefore necessary to show how the authoritative word of the Church, the great Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII., applies to women's work in particular.

**An individual
living wage due
in justice to
the woman
worker.**

It is perfectly certain from the words of the Encyclical that an employer is bound as a matter of strict commutative justice to pay his man-labourer at least an individual living wage, that is, one that will supply all his individual and personal wants. It is also certain that a woman worker has a strict right in justice to a similar wage, one sufficient for her personal and individual needs. As to whether a woman's needs are less than those of a man, and consequently as to whether her individual living wage may be lower than a man's, I shall say a word afterwards.

The reasons which render an individual living wage obligatory are identical in the case of a man and a woman. Both have, when poor, no other means of livelihood than wages received for work. Both have therefore a strict right that these wages should be enough to keep them in decent and proper comfort.

**A family wage
not so due
to her.**

As I said last day, it is certain (though not from the Encyclical) that an employer is, in the case of his man-labourer, bound to pay more than this individual wage, that he is bound to pay him a family wage. A woman, however, has no right to this family wage, as she is not the normal and natural provider of her family.

The lowest wage therefore which an employer can offer in security of conscience to his adult woman worker, of average strength, even quite unskilled, is a wage that will assure her decent housing and clothes, good food, and something over to brighten her present life with some joy, and her future with some hope. The law of supply and demand may raise the just price of her work

above this vital minimum, but must not drive it lower.

Of course this principle of humanity and justice is denied by the unscrupulous employer—and there are many such—who holds himself at liberty to pay his women any wretched wage which their desperate necessities may drive them to accept. He scouts the idea of any obligation in justice as it would deprive him of the commercial advantages which he enjoys in dealing with his women, advantages much greater than those which he enjoys when dealing with his men.

Women are more at their employer's mercy than men. They are more resigned to their misery than men. They have, compared with men, little taste or talent for agitation and organisation. They are more divided by class distinctions. They distrust each other more. More generous than men in every other respect, in this they are more self-centred.

They are more easily cowed by bullying, and more frightened by fear of the consequences of resistance. They have not the fighting spirit of men. Their very fidelity and family affection often increase their helplessness. If they have a little sister or brother, or aged parent or sick husband to support, they will suffer any privation, put up with any wretched pittance rather than jeopardise the interests of those dear to them. Besides, many of them looking on work as a temporary necessity from which they hope to be freed by marriage, do not go through any apprenticeship, or seriously qualify themselves by technical training in a skilled trade. For all these reasons they are almost quite unable to form Unions, the only efficacious defence of the labouring classes against exploitation.

No wonder then that women's work being left at the mercy of economic laws is wretchedly remunerated, and

that the vast majority of the sweated industries are women's industries.

Theories sometimes advanced to defend underpayment of women. There are some principles invoked to defend the underpayment of women against the charges of injustice and cruelty.

(A) woman's work is less valuable than man's work. It is often said for instance that women's work is not equal to that of men and is therefore to be less well paid.

The axiom "Equal pay for equal work" You all know the axiom "Equal work deserves equal pay." The accurate meaning of it is, that two people doing in the same time the same amount of work in an equally good way should be equally remunerated.

Such a principle appears to be just. It is appealed to even by the employers of sweated labour. Such men, where piecework is done in the homes of the workers, generally give exactly the same price for an article whether made by a man or a woman. Though such an employer invokes the principle because it suits his interests, and though the wage he gives to both men and women is shamefully unjust, still his contention that he need not pay the man more than the woman for the same work seems fair. Or again, if a man gets 3s. for a day's work why should a woman get only 1s. for the same day's work done equally well?

though not universally true Yet the formula "Equal wage for equal work" just and fair as it appears, is not to be taken as expressing a universal obligation in justice.

You will easily see how this is so. The minimum living wage must be paid to every worker, but the amount between this minimum and the just wage varies, and is to be determined by the higgling of the market. For instance, both an unskilled labourer and a plumber must get their minimum wage; but the just wage of a plumber is raised by the circumstances of the labour market beyond the just wage of the unskilled workman.

Now, in the same way, the higgling of the market may run up the rate of man's wages above the rate of woman's wages. An employer is bound to give his woman employee at least a living wage. He is bound to pay her what may be more. He is to give her the just price of her labour, but the higgling of the market may leave this just price of woman's labour at a lower point than the current price of the same work done by a man. Consequently in the numerous occupations, such as those of shop-assistants, clerks, servants, teachers, where it may happen that a woman's work is quite equally effective as that of a man, and yet brings in a wage very inferior to that of a man, we may hold that the woman's inferior wage is not *necessarily* unjust. Also, if an employer dismiss a man, and take on at a smaller wage a woman who can do the work equally well, he is not necessarily to be condemned off-hand for injustice.

He may, of course, be compelling the woman to undertake work unsuited to her sex or strength, or the inferior wage given her may be less than the just wage, or even less than the minimum living wage—in all which cases he will be committing a grave sin of injustice—but there will not be any injustice in the mere fact of his giving her a smaller wage than he has been giving the man whom she replaces.

Many trades, or many departments of certain trades, which were once in the hands of men, have passed into women's hands owing to the willingness of women to accept lower wages than men would put up with. In some of these cases the work is unsuited to women, and the employers who so transferred the work from men to women acted unjustly. In other cases the work is not unsuited to women, and the employers in thus replacing men by women are not guilty of any injustice if they pay their women a proper wage. It is to be feared, however, that such replacing of men's labour by women's labour has generally taken place simply because women could be got to work at a wage below the limit of justice, a wage that men would not accept.

As a general rule however, the work in which men are engaged and the work in which women are engaged are quite distinct from each other, and so different in character that employers can generally deny that they remunerate work differently according to the sex of the worker.

**is in general
a principle
of justice**

I have said that the principle of equal pay for equal work is not one of universal application. Still it is in the main a principle of justice and fair play. If it could be impressed on the public conscience as a rough working rule it would do much to check the shameful exploitation of woman's labour, and it would put some restraint on the very widespread abuse of paying even highly-skilled women less than quite unskilled men.

**(as is also a
corollary of it)** A corollary of this principle is that, where two workers, or two classes of workers, contribute by different operations

to the production of an article, the relation between their wages should be roughly equal to the relation between their shares in the production of the article. Such a principle would be, of course, generally unworkable as a practical guide, for the importance of the co-operation of any worker or set of workers is generally impossible to estimate; still it would be easy to show that this principle of fair-play is flagrantly violated in many industries. It is often the case that women perform all the important and laborious processes in the production of certain goods, and that men performing some quite subsidiary and easy process, carry off the lion's share of the wages.

**A woman's
work is often
less valuable
than a man's.**

The principle of equal pay for equal work would be, I say, a rough criterion as to the observance of justice in the payment of wages.

For instance, in the case of unskilled work, though a man has a right to a family wage and a woman a right only to a personal living wage, the relation between these two wages probably would roughly represent the relation between the quantity of work done by each. Not merely,

however, in those kinds of labour which demand physical strength, but in those which merely call for accuracy, sureness of touch, despatch, and even in occupations such as the tending of a shop or the keeping of accounts, it is found by experience that a man's labour is generally (though by no means always) superior in various respects to that of a woman. The difference between their wages may sometimes roughly represent their comparative efficiency, though it is unfortunately quite certain that far more often it is due merely to the greater ease with which women's labour can be exploited.

(B) **"A woman's wage is only a supplementary wage."** A second theory—which we may call "the theory of supplementary wages"—is often advanced by employers to defend themselves from the charge of cruelty or injustice. The theory is this, that a woman's wage need not be big because it is only a supplement of her husband's or her father's wage.

Some carry this theory very far. The daughter, they say, lives on her father's wages, the wife on her husband's, and if either of them take it into her head to work, it is not through necessity, but in order to get pocket-money or to indulge in superfluous pleasures.

If such were the case, namely, that a woman works merely to obtain superfluous luxuries, it would undoubtedly follow that no injustice would be done in remunerating such work by a diminutive salary. To use the words of the Pope, her work would be merely "personal" and therefore it "would be within the labourer's right to accept any rate of wages whatsoever," and it would be within the employer's right to haggle over the rate of her wages as he would haggle over the price of an article in a shop.

This is sometimes true Undoubtedly, too, it does happen sometimes that a young woman takes a position as a shop assistant or a clerk simply in order to provide herself with pocket-money. Also a young woman who is easily supported by her father may take up lace-making or some industry of the kind to enrich her wardrobe, or to have more money to spend

in amusing herself. Indeed this is (in some places at least) common enough among the daughters of well-to-do people, and even of people in a higher station of life. They sell their work cheap, and are too "grand" to haggle over its price, forgetting in their selfishness or thoughtlessness that, few as they are, they are doing a real injury to their less fortunate sisters by depressing the price of such work. It sometimes happens that a workingman's wife when her household work is over may do a little work to enrich the household stock, though she stand in no need of doing so.

Such "amateur" workers may be indeed, absolutely speaking, fairly numerous, but compared to the countless multitudes who work through dire necessity, they are a mere handful. To imagine that the womankind of the wage-earning classes do work as a dilettante occupation is to deliberately shut one's eyes to the realities of the world about one.

There are other employers who do not push this theory quite so far. They admit that women have to work through necessity, but they say that, as their fathers or husbands are earning wages—insufficient but still wages—a small wage, earned by the daughter or the wife, will bring up the family budget to what is enough for the comfort of the family, and that, therefore, a small wage is not an unjust one in the case of women.

but generally It is, of course, far from being the case
false and that every woman has either a husband
cannot be or a father working to support her.
acted on by Many have neither the one nor the
employer. other, but even in the case of those who
 have the one or the other this plea of the employer will
 not avail him.

When a married woman works for an employer, her employer is bound, as a matter of justice, to give her, not what will bring her husband's wage up to the level of a family wage—her husband's wage is no concern of her employer—but what would keep her, even if unmarried, in decent comfort. The fact that she has a husband has nothing to do with her employer. What

he has to remember is this, that she gives him her work, that she has a right in strict justice to get from him the value of it, and that that value, as we have seen, is her individual living wage.

With regard to the grown girl who lives in her father's house, the case is stronger still. If her father partly supports her it is more than he is bound in justice to do. The family wage, to which I have shown that her father is entitled, is only what will enable him to bring up his children till they are of age to work for themselves. No one ever dreamt that it should be sufficient to support a family of girls indefinitely, or until they get married; and the employer if it were a question of paying the girl's father would be first to scout such a ridiculous idea.

You see how contradictory is the position which some employers adopt. On the one hand, they say they need not give anything to their man-labourer beyond his personal wage, that they need not give him anything for the support of his family. On the other hand, when asked to pay a member of his family they say they have already paid for the support of that member. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot enjoy the advantages which would be theirs if they paid a family wage—indeed, which would be theirs only if they paid much more than a family wage—and, at the same time, refuse to pay such a wage.

Therefore when the daughter of a workingman grows up, say to the age of 18 or 19, and is able to do an adult woman's work, she ought not to be dependent on her father's work, and her employer has no right to take advantage of her father's willingness to encumber his little budget with her support. She works for her employer and has a right to get the value of her work, and that value is at the least what would support her (even if she got nothing from her father) in frugal comfort.

For the vast majority of women earning wages, their earnings mean for them food, clothes, housing, the necessities of life. It might be laid down as a general principle that an employer must always consider every grown girl or woman, whose labour is to be had in the

labour market, as one who works through necessity; that he is not therefore at liberty to beat down her wages as low as he can; that she has a right to demand, and does in fact demand—no matter what in her timidity or shame she may say to the contrary—the full value of her work, and that that value is at the least what would maintain her in reasonable comfort.

For consider the classes of women who work. The majority are probably unmarried girls who are too old to remain a burden on their father's slender resources. They have no one on whom they can depend, and too often (as in Ireland where the marriage rate is lower than almost anywhere in Europe) have little prospect of finding a husband to support them. Multitudes, too, are widows, often with young families to feed and clothe and house upon their earnings.

Lastly, there are the married women whom the goad of necessity drives forth to work. If the husband got a family wage his wife would not—at least generally would not—have to do anything but mind her house. But a family wage is, to say the least, not universal outside the ranks of skilled and organised labourers who can force it from their employers, and therefore the married woman is often forced to eke out her husband's wages by her own hard work. We must remember, too, that her wages so earned, even if they bring up the total family earnings to the level of a family wage, are always eaten into by the wastage and the many expenses which are entailed by her absence from home.

How often, indeed, are the needs of the wife equal to those of her unmarried or of her widowed sister! Her husband is often not a model. His wages often go into the till of the publican or the pocket of the betting agent. He may be an incapable workman unable to find employment, or he may be thrown out of work by the crises that so often occur in trade, or he may be disabled or sick for lengthy periods. If his wife is to be treated as a supplementary wage-earner, how can she face the heavy responsibilities which then devolve on her?

(C) "A woman's needs are less than a man's." A man, as we have seen, has a right to a wage which will enable him to support himself and his family. A woman on the other hand has a right only to the smaller wage which will ensure her own personal support. But some employers, ignoring the obligations of the workmen's family wage, and paying them a wage which would just suffice to support them individually, pay women workers much less still, on the ground that women's needs are less than those of men.

This contention is, as a general rule, true. How far this is the case. Woman eats less and drinks less than a man and she does not smoke. But in all else, lodging, dress and the rest, she has much the same expenses as a man. Moreover, there often exist circumstances which tend to bring her needs up towards the level of men's needs. If she work at home for instance she has heavy expenses of light and heating from which a man working outside or in a factory is exempt. Then, too, if she be married her work is interrupted from time to time by prolonged absences which bring down the value of her nominal wage. Then again in certain occupations she has to dress with a regard to style and elegance, which entails expenses from which the soberer and more constant style of men's clothes exempts them.

There is probably not such a big difference between men's and women's needs as certain interested people would have us believe. A woman's food and drink—I suppose habits of ordinary sobriety—will account for about three-fourths of her wage. On the other hand, a woman's food and drink ought not normally to be less than three-quarters of a man's. Supposing that a woman's other needs are equal to a man's—and we have seen that they are often greater—this would mean that her total needs would be four-fifths of a man's. Even putting her food at two-thirds of a man's, her needs would still be eight-elevenths of a man's. Yet we know that in most trades she never gets four-fifths or even eight-elevenths, but at most two-thirds or half of a man's wage. If in such trades the man were getting a family wage such a

disproportion might not be excessive, but he very often does not get a family wage, and this disproportion simply means that the woman is not getting nearly enough. Indeed I have not put the woman's case strongly enough, for you will all know of cases where she does not get even half of what an unskilled man will get.

Woman's weakness the main cause of her oppression. The real fact which cannot be blinked, is that a woman's wage is so low compared to a man's, not because her needs are so much less, but because her power of self-protection is less, because she can be exploited much more easily than a man.

When can employers justly plead inability to pay a proper wage to women? There are in Ireland I know, thank God, conscientious employers who pay their women workers a proper wage. All honour to them, and God's blessing be on them for resisting the temptations that beset them and the bad examples that are about them. There are others that do not pay a proper wage. If such men say that they cannot afford this wage they are adopting a more reasonable line of defence than the ones I have referred to. They may or may not be justified in alleging their inability to pay a proper wage. It may often happen in Ireland that small employers are so justified. I gave in the preceding lecture the principles by which in any particular case this plea of inability is to be judged valid or invalid.

Those who can pay a proper wage and do not are guilty of sin. It however requires only a slight acquaintance with the world about us to see that there are employers who grow rich and very rich on the sweated labour of women, and who could therefore quite well afford to pay them a proper wage, and yet do not pay it. Such men have no excuse. They are robbing their women workers. They are safe indeed from the police court, safe because laws have not yet been framed—as they assuredly will be in the near future—to render such injustice impossible, but not safe from the wrath of God; and all their social or commercial power will not avail them, when, at the

hour of their death, God will avenge on them the sufferings of their victims.

The Church most anxious to safeguard family life and to protect women workers

The Church, therefore, intervenes to protect women's just rights. She speaks, first of all, to individual employers, telling them their duties to their women-workers, and threatening them with God's wrath if they neglect their duties.

Again, in the Encyclicals of her Popes, Leo XIII. and Pius X., in the letters of her Bishops, in the sermons of her priests, in the books of her authors, the Church is incessantly calling on States and Statesmen to pass laws which may preserve family life and safeguard the dignity of women and her functions in society against the pressure of industrial competition. This is one of the first objects of every Catholic political party in the Parliaments of the Continent.

calls on all Christians,

You all remember that beautiful page in the Gospel where we read that Christ, gazing on the multitude in the desert, says: "I have compassion on this multitude, because they are with Me now twelve days and have not what to eat. I will not send them away fasting lest they faint by the way." And then we read how He took the five loaves and the fishes, and multiplying them by His omnipotence, fed the four thousand men, besides women and children.

Oh! may Catholics lay to heart the lessons which Christ then wished to reach; may they learn to think of the poor, to pity them, to help them, and especially the poor women who cannot so easily help themselves.

Christ dwelt on the sufferings of these poor people in the desert. He felt in imagination their hunger. He foresaw their fainting by the way as they dragged themselves wearily back to their villages. How little do we think of the poor about us! How little we know of them! We see them in the streets. If their poverty was a passing inconvenience we might do something, but, because it is a clinging cloud of sorrow that chills and darkens their whole lives from cradle to grave, we merely throw them an alms—a kind of gesture of despair—and turn

to think of pleasanter things. The poor live in the next street to us, and we know as little of them as if they lived in some distant country. We do not reflect on their feelings, their sufferings, their fears, their resources, their difficulties, their temptations.

Christ teaches us to pity the poor. "*Misereor super hanc turbam.*" "I have pity on this multitude." He has made men to help each other and in order to help they must first have love and pity. "By this shall all men know that you are My Disciples, that you love one another." The words seem almost ironical. How seldom do we prove in that way that we are His Disciples! How often it happens that we do not act as Christians! What do I say? How often we do not act as human beings should act! We care only for those of our household. But even the brute beasts love their offspring and their parents. It is man's privilege and his duty to embrace in his love those outside his home.

Christ teaches us to help the poor. Sad indeed would be the state of the poor were it not for the poor, for it is the poor who help the poor most often. Very beautiful is the sight of the poor giving to the poor, but it is a sad sight too, for it forces one to reflect that many who could more easily give, and should give, do not give. All of us can give something.

God gave some men wealth, but it is wealth burdened by many debts, debts of justice and of charity. The owners of wealth are not its absolute owners. They are only its stewards, and will have to account to God for every penny of it. An honest man will refrain from taking money that does not belong to him. "God has not given it to me," he says. Yet he will often cling fiercely to that which is his, and will feel wronged if God, who has given it all to him, asks back a small part of it as charity for His poor, or demands it as justice.

even on those There are many of you who cannot
who are not rich give of your money, but there is none
to undertake social of you who cannot give of the charity
works for the of your thought, your care, your
protection of work.
women.

Our Holy Father Pope Leo XIII. felt some of that

sacred compassion which filled and still fills the heart of Christ. In especial he, the father of the Christian family, was moved with pity for the multitudes of his daughters lying wounded and helpless beneath the cruel crushing injustices of modern industrialism, and he knew that he would not appeal in vain to their sisters of happier condition to come to their rescue; and our present Pope Pius X. has often repeated this appeal.

Their appeals have not been in vain. There has always been a wealth of charity in Catholic women's hearts. Their individual acts of kindness will be richly rewarded by Christ, but individual charity can only touch—can hardly make an impression on the deep black mass of misery that burdens and disgraces every town and every countryside in the land. To introduce a strong solvent into that mass of misery, charity must be organised, must become social work.

**Catholics in
other lands
have done much.
Why not in
Ireland also?**

To this social work and especially work for women, Catholics, and especially Catholic women, have devoted themselves nobly. In every country on the Continent—would I could say quite as much for Ireland!—thousands and thousands of Catholic women, rich and poor, humble and noble, devote much of their time and sacrifice much of their pleasures. They give their serious thought to examining the conditions of life of their poorer sisters, they visit them in their homes, they gather them together, form them into classes which they often teach themselves, they have them taught trades, they inspire them with hope and courage in face of life's difficulties, with mutual helpfulness and mutual trust, they organise them in various societies of mutual help, and they unite them in associations for the defence of their rights against all oppression.

Such works are the bread which Christ through the mouth of the Pontiff demands of Catholics, for the poor to-day, far more than alms. This is the bread which the power of God will multiply four thousandfold in generous hands. The example of our Catholic brethren in other lands teaches and encourages us to found such works.

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Edited by REV. JOSEPH McDONNELL, S.J.

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